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NAVY-MARINE CORPS OPERATIONAL COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS AND THE
JOINT FORCE COMMANDER: UNFINISHED BUSINESS?

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War college in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of
NAVY-MARINE CORPS OPERATIONAL COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS AND THE
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The Navy-Marine Corps team continues to demonstrate readiness, relevance and capability to meet the challenges of today's national security environment in the wake of post "Cold War" Department of Defense reevaluation of roles and missions and the attendant force restructuring. Less impressive have been the naval Services efforts to develop mutually acceptable doctrine to govern naval expeditionary force employment in joint operations. Evolution of naval doctrine and revision of joint amphibious doctrine remains unfinished business.

Internal debates among the naval Services seek answers to essentially tactical, not operational, questions. The more important question is: How should the Navy-Marine Corps team be organized to best facilitate integration into a joint force organization? Revision of Joint Pub 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations, provides the naval services a perfect opportunity to answer the larger operational question while settling the tactical question as well. Existing joint doctrine, in the form of Joint Pub 0-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF) and Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations, provides answers.

Military organizations, especially successful ones, normally tend to resist change. Order reigns, and there are reasons why this is so. As a result, military organizations view change and innovation with great caution. The wrong changes after all can be fatal, not just for those in uniform but also for their societies. But sometimes, caution can lead to stagnation; and failure to adjust to global changes, advances in military technologies, or innovations in the conduct of war can lead to the same kind of disasters that cautious bias about change and innovation was supposed to prevent.¹

--Adm William A. Owens

INTRODUCTION

The Navy-Marine Corps team continues to demonstrate strategic readiness, relevance and capability to meet the challenges of today's national security environment in the wake of post "Cold War" reevaluation of roles and missions and attendant force restructuring. One need look no farther than today's headlines detailing deployments of Fleet carrier battle groups and Marine Forces around the globe to see convincing evidence of the Navy-Marine Corps team's successful transition through force restructuring and drawdowns.

Perhaps even more impressive has been the Navy-Marine Corps team's work developing visionary operational concepts to ensure that the naval Services remain ready, relevant and

¹ Adm William A. Owens, High Seas: The Naval Passage to an Uncharted World, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995, pp. vii-viii.

capable to meet the challenges of the future national security environment. This is evident in forward-thinking concept documents such as From the Sea, Forward ... From the Sea, the Navy Operational Concept, Operational Maneuver At Sea, Operational Maneuver from the Sea and Ship to Objective Maneuver. These concepts envision employment of naval expeditionary forces in littoral warfare across the entire spectrum of conflict, investing heavily in the prediction that we are in the midst of a "revolution in military affairs." Each seeks to harness advanced technology, the inherent synergy of joint warfare and maneuver warfare to dominate the littoral battlespace. By their organization and capabilities, the naval Services complement National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy and are well positioned to transition to the future.

Far less impressive than the aforementioned achievements have been the Navy-Marine Corps team's efforts to develop mutually acceptable doctrine to govern naval expeditionary force employment in joint operations. Evolution of naval doctrine and revision of joint amphibious doctrine remains unfinished business, apparently lost somewhere between the crush of today's operational tempo and the visionary quest to

propel the Navy-Marine Corps team into the 21st century. More likely, issues remain unsettled because of incompatibilities between "blue-water" and "green-water" doctrine.

Having successfully adjusted to drastic changes in the threat and establishing bold concepts for the future, the Navy and Marine Corps must now turn to solving doctrinal issues that plague the team today. Near term campaigns and major operations, the fate of doctrine in support of joint operations in the littorals and the implementation of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Joint Vision 2010 may well depend on it.

Internal debates probing amphibious command relationships, composite warfare commander architecture and naval expeditionary forces in joint operations are important matters, however, they seek answers to essentially tactical, not operational, questions. The more important question is: How should the Navy-Marine Corps team be organized to best facilitate rapid and seamless integration into a joint force organization? Revision of Joint Pub 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations, provides the naval services a perfect opportunity to answer the larger operational question while settling the tactical issues as well. Despite having been

written decades after amphibious doctrine, existing joint doctrine, in the form of Joint Pub 0-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF), and Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations, provides answers.

INTRAMURAL FRICTION

Today's professional military journals offer ample evidence of the Navy-Marine Corps team's institutional disconnect on conducting operations as a naval expeditionary force. The Navy and the Marine Corps have recently engaged in a vigorous internal doctrinal debate over naval expeditionary force command relationships in the conduct of joint operations. Many of the joint operations today, and in the foreseeable future, are being conducted in the littorals by forces with an amphibious capability. Amphibious forces have always focused on the littorals and now, with the "Cold War" over, the Navy's carrier battle group (CVBG) focus has begun to move. Thus, intramural friction most often takes the form of arguments over the command relationship between the commander, amphibious task force (CATF) and the commander, landing force (CLF), the amphibious task force (ATF) role in the Navy's composite warfare commanders (CWC) concept, integration of the amphibious ready group (ARG)/Marine

expeditionary unit (MEU) into the CVBG, or the now defunct "Naval Expeditionary Task Force (NETF) Command and Control (C2)" concept.² These contentious issues have surfaced publicly in Proceedings and Marine Corps Gazette articles such as "CNEF Arriving!,"³ "Let CLF Do It,"⁴ "Obey the Iron Law,"⁵ and "CNEF, We Hardly Knew Ye."⁶

Less obvious, and not referred to in the aforementioned articles, is what I believe to be the root cause of the tactical friction amongst the naval services: The revision of Joint Publication 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations (Lead Agent: U.S. Navy), now underway. This time-honored doctrine, last updated in October of 1992, is the product of the exceptional vision and practice during the period between World Wars I and II. It is comprised of Navy, Marine Corps and Army lessons learned in the crucible of combat during battles fought at hallowed places such as

² Cdr T.J. McKearney, USN (Ret), "CNEF Arriving!," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1996, pp. 36-40.

³ Ibid.

⁴ LtCol Thomas X. Hammes, USMC, "Let CLF Do It," Marine Corps Gazette, March 1997, pp. 17-21.

⁵ Cdr Terry Pierce, USN, "Obey the Iron Law," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, November, 1997, pp. 28-31.

⁶ Cdr T.J. McKearney, USN (Ret), "CNEF, We Hardly Knew Ye," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1998, p. 10.

Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Salerno, Okinawa, Iwo Jima, Normandy and Inchon.⁷

Naval officers, the majority born well after the last major amphibious assault took place (Inchon, 1951), are more than a little reluctant to consider changing amphibious doctrine. But the vast majority of naval officers, particularly the more senior officers, were on duty when the Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (more commonly referred to as the Goldwater-Nichols Act) made joint operations the law of the land. When our naval forefathers crafted and executed amphibious doctrine, "jointness," though a common, if unintended, side effect of their wars, campaigns and major operations, was not the driving factor that it is today, nor could they reasonably have foreseen it. However, amphibious operations by their scope and unique nature were primarily joint operations. It falls upon this generation of officers to adapt naval command relationships to joint doctrine.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Charles C. Krulak, has taken the lead in attempting to jump-start the operational debate over joint force integration at the service level in his article Joint Force Quarterly article, "Doctrine

⁷ Cdr Terry Pierce, USN, "Obey the Iron Law," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, November, 1997, pp. 28-31.

for Joint Force Integration." While the other Service Chiefs wrote articles outlining their services' vision for supporting Joint Vision 2010, General Krulak outlined shortfalls in the current method of employing joint forces that require attention before the visionary work can proceed. He targeted flexibility in joint force organization and command relationships as a means for optimizing the capabilities of joint forces. The mission should be the driving factor behind organization of the joint force, precluding default solutions:

Nowhere is the need for flexibility more critical than in our approach to arranging command relationships within a joint force. The proper organization of a force for mission accomplishment is one of the most important functions of command.⁸

The problem with the Navy-Marine Corps intramural debate is that it is wrongly focused on the tactical level to the detriment of more important operational level issues. The most important operational level issue, the principle factor that should drive development of and/or revision of all naval doctrine, is its relevance to the mission of the joint force commander (JFC). How the Navy and Marine Corps internally

⁸ Gen. Charles C. Krulak, USMC, "Doctrine for Joint Force Integration," Joint Force Quarterly, Winter 1996-97, p. 21.

organize to fight (a tactical concern) is only important as it relates to facilitating interoperability with joint force organization. Further, tactical issues are not likely to be solved to anyone's (JFC, USN, USMC) satisfaction until this operational issue is settled.

The revision to Joint Pub 3-02 and subsequently Joint Pub 3-02.1, Joint Doctrine for Landing Force Operations, is a crucial step in settling Navy-Marine Corps operational relationships and should focus on, at long last, making amphibious command relationships truly joint. This doctrine, so essential to operational success in past campaigns and major operations, is now more vital than ever as the naval Services set a course to support the concepts outlined in Joint Vision 2010 and develop doctrine for the concepts set forth in From the Sea, Forward ... From the Sea, Navy Operational Concept, Operational Maneuver At Sea, Operational Maneuver from the Sea and Ship to Objective Maneuver. Though much of the science of amphibious warfare remains essentially unchanged over the last fifty years, the art has changed considerably because of the preponderance of the missions [military operations other than war (MOOTW)] being conducted by joint forces in the littorals.

The joint integration issue for the Navy-Marine Corps team is all too often overshadowed as debate devolves into the CATF versus CLF argument, questions of how to command organize a CVBG/ARG/MEU, or how to fit CATF-CLF into the Navy's CWC "blue water" architecture. These issues are only pertinent when discussed in context with independent naval operations; how numbered Fleets and Fleet Marine Forces currently operate together while conducting routine deployments and exercises. However, it is not relevant in context of contingency operations, MOOTW, or combat operations as they will be conducted as joint operations through a combatant commander.

Twelve years after the Goldwater-Nichols act, the days of independent (Navy-Marine Corps only) major naval operations and campaigns such as were seen in World War II are over, and rightfully so. The National Command Authorities (NCA), the combatant commanders, have made joint forces the force of choice for even the most time sensitive crises situations because of the array of capabilities and options they provide. It is difficult to imagine that a combatant commander would choose anything but a joint force to conduct campaigns or major operations, which inherently allow more time to organize, deploy and employ. As such, the Navy-Marine Corps

team should train as it will most likely be employed in the fight, as part of a joint force organization.

In an increasingly complex world, we must avoid a "cookie cutter" approach to joint warfighting. It is misguided to impulsively organize joint forces along purely functional lines, or according to the medium in which they operate -- land, sea, or air. Under this logic, functional organizations are assumed to negate service parochialism and achieve the desired levels of jointness. However, they do not necessarily provide the most effective force for all operations. It may be necessary to organize along service lines, even employing a combination of service and functional components. Each joint force must be organized for the mission at hand and seek the greatest flexibility possible.⁹

JOINT DOCTRINE FOR AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS: NOT JOINT YET

Joint Pub 3-02, no doubt because of its World War II roots, does not adequately reflect command relationships for joint operations advanced in the UNAAF and Joint Pub 3-0 (specifically Service componentcy and command relationships). It also does nothing to reconcile command relationship conflicts with CWC architecture, extremely important now that CVBG focus is shifting from "blue-water" to the littorals. Consequently, command relationships developed during World War II for the conduct of naval campaigns must be updated to reflect today's joint force operational environment. They

⁹ Editor's Note, Gen Charles C. Krulak, "Doctrine for Joint Force Integration," Joint Force Quarterly, Winter 1996-1997, p. 20.

must reconcile CVBG/ARG/MEU command relationships with the overall objective of enhancing the conduct of the JFC's campaign and the accomplishment of the JFC's mission. Joint amphibious doctrine can be the means to that end.

Generally, amphibious doctrine does not adequately discuss how operational art relates across the full range of military operations. More importantly, it fails to adequately discuss how an amphibious force would best organize to integrate into a joint force, providing the JFC with flexibility. It's emphasis remains on internal organization for independent naval operations, complete with an annex detailing amphibious warfare's place within CWC architecture. Though the term commander, joint amphibious task force (CJATF) is used occasionally, the term is used only to distinguish an independent naval action subordinate to a JFC and does not imply that the JATF is a truly joint organization: "...the terms ATF and CATF apply equally to either JATF or Navy and Marine Corps operations."¹⁰ A few specific examples serve to illustrate how amphibious doctrine has not responded to changes in the joint environment.

¹⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations (Joint Pub 3-02), Washington, D.C., 8 October 1992, p. I-2.

Although amphibious doctrine alludes to the enhanced unity of effort¹¹ inherent in command relationship options¹² for the conduct of amphibious operations with references to Joint Pubs 0-2 and 0-3, it remains centered upon the "stove-piped" CATF-CLF arrangement. While CATF and CLF are coequal during the planning phase, CLF comes under the operational control (OPCON) of CATF for all subsequent phases. There are no other command relationship options provided or considered: "The criteria for deciding on task force organization are the Service composition of the force and the desires of the JFC. In either case, CATF will retain responsibility for, and operational control of, forces assigned to the ATF and JATF."¹³ Within CWC architecture, CATF is subordinate to the officer in tactical command (OTC), conceivably positioning CLF four levels below the joint force commander. Thus, while recognizing the benefit of joint doctrine and flexible command relationships based on the mission, amphibious doctrine does not apply the principles to itself.

¹¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations (Joint Pub 3-0), Washington, D.C., 1 February 1995, p. II-6.

¹² Joint Chiefs of Staff, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF) (Joint Pub 0-2), Washington, D.C., 24 February 1995, p. III-8 - III-12.

¹³ Joint Pub 3-02, p. I-3

If the aforementioned examples aren't enough to tie the hands of the JFC in deciding the organization of the force, amphibious doctrine ties the knot by stipulating that CATF will be a Navy officer.¹⁴ This statement, perhaps most contentious and likely to bring out emotion in the ongoing debate, is the best evidence of just how outdated and inflexible the current amphibious command relationship is. Most arguments tend to pose maritime operations as the exclusive domain of the Navy officer, regardless of the mission. They rely heavily upon the notion that the commanders involved will be professional enough to work through conflicts.¹⁵ This makes little sense in an era where the chief threat will come from the littorals and on land, not from a "blue-water" naval force. It does not take into account that Marine Corps officers have been assigned as JFCs and as supported commanders for maritime operations in this decade. These assignments were not based on which uniform the commanders wore, but upon the commanders involved, the situation and the mission. Further, JFCs, supported by joint doctrine, will decide in favor of command relationship options

¹⁴ Ibid., p. II-9.

¹⁵ Cdr T.J. McKearney, USN (Ret), "CNEF, We Hardly Knew Ye," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1998, p. 10.

because it enhances their ability to control the force and unity of effort.

JOINT DOCTRINE: THE ANSWER

Joint doctrine provides principles and guidance governing overall command relationships and organization of the joint force. As such, joint amphibious doctrine may find answers to contentious issues in senior joint publications. For command relationships, Joint Pub 0-2 states, "The JFC has the authority to organize the force to best accomplish the mission based on the concept of operations."¹⁶ This clearly implies that joint amphibious doctrine should not direct an OPCON-only relationship between CATF and CLF. But, the absence of joint doctrine specifically for command and control no doubt contributes to differing interpretations.

However, Joint Pub 3-56, Command and Control Doctrine for Joint Operations (DRAFT), is available (Lead Agent: U.S. Army). Though not approved joint doctrine, it can serve to provide insight into trends in thinking. The section addressing functional components is instructive:

joint force land component commander (JFLCC): The JFC normally designates the Army component commander or the Marine Corps component commander as JFLCC...Forces of other Services are usually placed OPCON or TACON for specified time periods, phases or

¹⁶ Joint Pub 0-2, p. IV-2.

until accomplishment of specified tasks or missions.¹⁷

joint force maritime component commander (JFMCC):
"The JFC may designate a Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard component commander as the JFMCC...when the joint operation calls for large-scale sea, land and amphibious operations. A JFMCC may provide the JFC with enhanced unity of command by acting as a focal point for diverse transitional (sea to land) operations. The designation of a JFMCC is usually transitory and may only be required for a phase of an operation. At the end of the phase the JFC revises command and control relationships."¹⁸

Note that both of the above passages clearly delineate the mission as the guiding principle in organization. Further, they both leave the choice of a particular Service commander as an option, with the mission being the paramount consideration. I contend that providing the JFC with options, as the aforementioned statements do (albeit without authority), is preferable to the binding statements currently found in amphibious doctrine.

¹⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Command and Control Doctrine for Joint Operations (DRAFT) (Joint Pub 3-56), Washington, D.C., April 1997, pp. 1-11 - 1-12.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 1-12.

CONCLUSION

"Sea-based power projection forces -- namely, carrier battle groups, and amphibious groups embarked with Marines--offer to decision makers military power that is multi-faceted in capability and deployable around the world."¹⁹
--Richard Cheney, Former Secretary of Defense

The Navy-Marine Corps team is well-positioned to remain the National Command Authorities' force of choice when dealing with emerging crises around the globe. However, the post "Cold War" shift of focus from independent "blue-water" operations to joint operations in the littorals presents challenges on many fronts. Evolving naval expeditionary force concepts in support of Joint Vision 2010, while important, should not detract from confronting challenges that exist in employment of the naval Services in joint operations today.

Of immediate concern is ensuring continued evolution of naval doctrine governing command relationships and CWC architecture, enhancing CVBG and ATF interoperability during independent deployments. Despite having separately passed the test of time and numerous operations, CVBG, CWC and ATF command relationships are not compatible. More importantly, the Navy and Marine Corps must combine and redouble efforts to

¹⁹ "Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps Presentation" at Marine Link.
<<http://www.usmc.mil/nsf>> (5 February 1998).

revise amphibious doctrine, adapting command relationships to existing joint doctrine, to facilitate rapid and seamless integration into a joint force organization. Revision of Joint Pub 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations, provides the naval Services an opportunity to focus intellectual effort and operational expertise simultaneously on these challenges. Existing joint doctrine, in the form of Joint Pub 0-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF) and Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations, provide ample guidance for the way ahead.

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